

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 003937

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2015

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: GENERAL MYERS MEETS WITH GENERAL OSPINA

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons  
1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (U) April 10, 2005, National Administrative Center  
(CAN), Bogota

2. (U) Participants:

U.S.

-----

General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of  
Staff (CJCS)

Ambassador William B. Wood

US Defense Attach, Colonel William Graves

Military Group Commander, Colonel Simeon Trombitas

Mr. Paul Hanley, Director of Strategic Communications

Colonel Rodney O. Anderson, Executive Assistant

Colonel Frederick S. Rudesheim, J-5 Action Officer

Colombia

-----

General Carlos Ospina Ovalle, Commander of Colombian Military  
Forces

-----

Summary

-----

3. (C) On 10 April 2005, General Myers and General Ospina discussed leishmaniasis and other health and welfare issues, morale, challenges to the joint commands, Venezuela, Colombian cross border cooperation and operations, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) attacks. Ospina reported that leishmaniasis had seriously impacted the Colombian Army, and there was a shortage of glucantime, one of the few medications used to treat this disease, due to budgetary and distribution problems. Ospina mentioned the need to maintain good morale among his troops in the field and underscored the importance of instilling the joint command concept in the minds of Colombian military officers. Ospina said he saw a lack of unity among the Venezuelan armed forces; he believed the Venezuelan military was going along with Chavez policies for self-preservation. Ospina admitted that cross-border operations were illegal but still a necessity given Venezuela's tendency not to take action. Ospina stated that the apparent upsurge in FARC activity was in direct reaction to the government's operations in the Plan Patriota IIB area of operations. End Summary.

-----  
LEISHMANIASIS AND OTHER HEALTH ISSUES  
-----

4. (C) Ospina warned the biggest health and welfare issue for the Colombian military was the high incidence of leishmaniasis among deployed combat units. Ospina, himself a leishmaniasis victim about 10 years ago, stated that there were over 1,000 cases. (Comment: The Colombian military and medical community reported 3,163 cases in 2004 and 2,089 cases for the first three months of 2005.) Ospina mentioned the shortage of glucantime, one of the few medications used to treat this disease. Colombia obtains this medication from a Brazilian manufacturer, but budget limitations and distribution problems are making it hard for the military to obtain the drugs in sufficient quantities. Ospina attributed the increase in leishmaniasis cases to long-term exposure to the vector; Colombian troop rotations in the Plan Patriota IIB area of operations are for five months, with one month of leave between rotations. A secondary, but by no means minor, problem is malaria.

-----  
MORALE ISSUES  
-----

5. (C) To help boost morale among his troops in the field, Ospina and his staff made great efforts to visit deployed troops. Ospina believed these visits were having a direct and

positive impact on morale and asserted that soldiers and officers were dealing well with the hardships of long-term deployments. Moreover, he noted that the 30-day rest and relaxation period figured prominently in the morale and command climate of deployed units. Ospina emphasized that any U.S. support that ensured the availability of helicopter assets to support these troop rotations would be of critical importance.

-----  
JOINT COMMANDS AND THEIR CHALLENGES  
-----

16. (C) According to Ospina, the toughest aspect of his position is changing the mindset of the services and getting joint force commanders to report directly to him, while still answering to their respective service chiefs. The services see this arrangement as a loss of power and control over their subordinates. He has struggled to exercise control over the two existing joint commands, Joint Task Force Omega (JTF-O) and the 1st Joint Command, also known as the Caribbean Command. Ospina said that he would continue his efforts to change the mindset and that the next joint command under consideration will be in the Pacific region. General Myers applauded this commitment to joint operations, and Ambassador Wood remarked that the Colombian military has undergone a parallel transformation from a static, garrison-based force to forward-deployed, mobile combat forces.

-----  
VENEZUELA  
-----

17. (C) When asked by Ambassador Wood for his perception of the Venezuela situation, Ospina said he saw a lack of unity among the Venezuelan armed forces. He believed the Venezuelan military was trying to go along with Chavez policies out of self-preservation. Ospina expected less cooperation between Venezuelan and Colombian military units along the border; the Chavez regime exercised tight control on any official contact with Colombian civilian and military border units. He cited frequent low-level hot pursuit and shooting incidents that could be further complicated by bad decision-making on one or both sides of the border. Ospina was particularly concerned with the existing and potentially growing corruption of Venezuelan border security personnel and how this would favor the FARC's acquisition and movement of Venezuelan arms into Colombia. When questioned by Ambassador Wood on the potential strategic threat, Ospina mentioned that Venezuela's plan to acquire warships from Spain may become a threat in the future. He also mentioned Venezuela's purchase of 100,000 rifles could result in some of these ending up in the hands of the FARC. Ospina saw no imbalance between what he described as light infantry forces in Venezuela and Colombia. However, he was aware of heavier Venezuelan forces farther away from the border.

-----  
COLOMBIAN CROSS BORDER COOPERATION AND OPERATIONS  
-----

18. (C) Ambassador Wood asked about Colombia's intentions on continued cross border intelligence collection and ground and air operations against FARC elements in Venezuela. Ospina reacted with a surprised look and a nervous chuckle. He then explained that these operations are not officially recognized but that it was frustrating for Colombia to pass actionable information to Venezuelan authorities just to have them sit on it without taking any action. He indicated that the capture of FARC international representative Rodrigo Granda was justified in light of the FARC's unchecked operations in Venezuela.

-----  
FARC OFFENSIVE OR INFORMATION OPERATIONS CAMPAIGN?  
-----

19. (C) When asked to comment on what some in the press were calling a FARC offensive since 1 Jan 2005, Ospina stated that the apparent upsurge in FARC activity was in direct reaction to the government's operations in the Plan Patriota IIB area of operations. According to Ospina, the FARC was hoping to divert Colombian military resources away from the JTF-O area of operations, drawing regional and international attention to what they hope is their continued viability as a fighting guerrilla force. Moreover, he downplayed the significance of recent FARC attacks and ambushes by portraying them as being more the result of government mistakes rather than the result of FARC military prowess. He said the military grew somewhat complacent from the successes of 2004, and some low-level, inexperienced commanders had made some understandable, but costly, mistakes. Ospina concluded that the guerrillas were still being forced out of their traditional strongholds, its leaders were still on the run, and they were in no position to tip the strategic balance in their favor. Ospina believed President Uribe was

successfully mobilizing the public and the government, as evidenced by his successful legislative push to raises taxes and move the government in the right direction in support of the war effort.

WOOD